

Foreword to Palgrave St Antony's 'Fresh Riff' Series

St Antony's College in Oxford opened its doors to students in 1950. From its beginnings, it was a centre for postgraduate teaching, specialising in area studies. All the University of Oxford's area studies activities can trace their modern roots to St Antony's; when in 2004 the university established its first department of area studies (originally called the School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies, renamed the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies), all but two of its permanent academic staff were fellows of the college.

It took several years though before the college could find a publishing partner for its specialist research. In the 1950s, it had a relationship with Chatto and Windus (now an imprint of Penguin Random House) which published papers on Soviet Affairs, South Asian Affairs, the Middle East and Far East (as East Asia was then known). An attempt to work with Blackwells never realised any publications, but the college did have a brief partnership with Oxford University Press that saw the publication of a few volumes in the second half of the 1960s. In the early 1970s, the College tried a new publishing relationship, this time with Allen & Unwin, but by the mid-1970s that had also folded.

It was not until the mid-1970s, therefore, that St Antony's had its first conversations with Macmillan and in 1977 that the Macmillan (later Palgrave Macmillan) St Antony's series was officially inaugurated. The series quickly went from strength to strength, and it was soon publishing on average close to ten volumes a year. As of 2024, it has published 420 volumes and will get close to 450 by the time of its half-century in 2027.

It is hard to imagine that there have been longer or more successful publishing partnerships between an Oxbridge College and a publishing house than the St Antony's series. It is certainly the longest-standing series of any subject at Palgrave. This is even more impressive when one considers that when the relationship started the college was still in its infancy and how few fellows and students it had. So, how did this partnership flourish when previous relationships had not - and over a time when the commercial pressure on publishing houses became ever more severe?

Part of the answer, of course, lies in the growth of the St Antony's community and its research output. Today, St Antony's has approximately 550 students, around half of whom are writing doctoral theses. It has around 120 attached post-doctoral fellows and departmental lecturers from all the departments in social sciences and humanities from which it admits students. It has on average 40 academic visitors each year from all around the world and from many walks of life – political, business, charity, military, diplomatic, as well as academic. It has 100 Governing Body Fellows, Emeritus Fellows and Honorary Fellows. Collectively, this community is producing some of the most exciting work in area studies anywhere in the world.

Much of the credit though for the success of the series also goes to the dedicated editorship of a number of St Antony's fellows (from Archie Brown who was the first to Dan Healey and Leigh Payne who are the latest) and the support of successive colleagues at Macmillan and Palgrave (from Tim Farmiloe, who curated the Series for its first twenty years, to Ambra Finotello who looks after it today). It is they who have understood that for any publication series to survive and prosper, it needs to constantly review and refresh itself. Nothing represents this innovation better than these 'Fresh Riff' volumes which have been prepared to celebrate both the 75th anniversary of St Antony's College and the 50th anniversary of the Palgrave St Antony's series.